

Reading Group Guide for
The Innocent
by Ann H. Gabhart

1. Carlyn held on to the hope that her husband, Ambrose, would come home from fighting in the Civil War long after it was obvious that he would not. Have you ever clung to hope in what seemed hopeless situations? What was the situation? Were your hopes ever realized? Did you feel your prayers were unheard the way Carlyn did at times?
2. Carlyn was very attached to her dog, Asher, her faithful companion after Ambrose marched away with the Union Army. Why do you think she got that attached to Asher? Have you had a dog friend like that? Why do you think pets mean so much to us?
3. Sheriff Mitchell Brodie wants to keep the people in his county safe. Do you believe most lawmen have that kind of commitment and purpose? Have you or any of your family been public servants such as policemen or firemen? How would you describe the relationship between the public servant and the people in his or her community?
4. When Carlyn realizes she is going to be homeless, she decides to ask her church for help even though she hates having to admit her need. What do you think this says about her character? Describe a time when you may have felt this way.
5. Do you think Mitchell only agreed to take in Asher because he was attracted to Carlyn? What other reasons might he have had?
6. Curt Whitlow tried to force his attentions on Carlyn as she was on the way to church. What was your reaction when Carlyn thought it best not to go on to church and reveal what had happened? She feared people would blame her instead of Whitlow. In that historical era, do you think that was a reasonable fear? How do you think that situation would have played out in today's world?
7. When Carlyn heard the Shaker bell, she thought it was the Lord's answer to her dilemma of being homeless. Later, she's not as sure. Have you had specific moments where you felt the Lord answered your prayers?

8. Mitchell had been hurt by the woman he loved marrying someone else while he was fighting in the war. But he still carried the dream of having a family. What effect do you think war has on love and the possibility of marriage?
9. Do you like stories that have a dog or other animal characters? What did you like or dislike about Asher?
10. Sister Edna is a harsh taskmaster with Carlyn. Who have you known that behaves similarly to Sister Edna?
11. Carlyn struggled to accept the Shaker rules on how to live. How do you feel about the Shaker rules? Do you believe that they were necessary for their members to live in peaceful union as Sister Edna claimed?
12. In the story, one of the Shakers' barns is set on fire by unknown arsonists. This did happen several times in the history of the Shakers. Why do you think some people were determined to persecute the Shakers, who simply wanted to separate from the world and live in peace?
13. Mrs. Snowden, the boardinghouse owner, tries to be a matchmaker between her niece and Mitchell. Have you ever attempted to be a matchmaker and get two people romantically interested in one another? How did that turn out?
14. Carlyn's memories of Ambrose bring him to life even though he never makes an actual appearance in the story. What did you think about his love for Carlyn in his last letter to her?
15. Throughout the story, Carlyn remembers how her mother told her to pray no matter what the circumstances of her life. How do you think Carlyn felt about this, considering some of the things that happened to her in the story? Do you believe in the power of prayer?



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